

Hobart book traces beginnings of postal system



Bob Adams...says if it wasn't for the prodding of a Hobart history buff, he wouldn't have marked his debut as a writer. [HERALD photos by Terry Loncaric]

by TERRY LONCARIC

HOBART -- Bob Adams of Hobart makes no bones about it. If it weren't for the prodding of another Hobart history buff, he wouldn't have marked his recent debut as a writer.

Adams and Hobart historical Museum curator Dorothy Ballantyne teamed up to write "Along the Route," a history of the city's post offices and postmasters.

Mrs. Ballantyne said she began "pestering" Adams about writing a book a year ago. She convinced Adams with his nose for research and her literary skills they could write a chronicle that would whet the appetites of the city's hungriest historians.

The book, published by the Hobart Historical Society, may not climb to the top of any best seller lists, but it's already making headway as a classroom text for many Hobart grade school teachers.

And, according to Mrs. Ballantyne, the book also passed the acid test of historical accuracy. "Historians at colleges have highly praised the book," she said.

Ballantyne and Adams spent a year scouring through cemetery records, school records and documents furnished by the National archives.

"I read microfilm until I got seasick," Mrs. Ballantyne giggled.

But between spells of seasickness and writer's cramp, there were also moments of poignant nostalgia. Adams said looking at old newspaper clips stirred boyhood memories. "I enjoyed looking at businesses I remembered as a kid," the 73-year-old author said.

The research, Mrs. Ballantyne quickly reminds you, was more than just a nostalgic joy ride. She and Adams logged many marathon sessions tracing the history of Hobart's post offices.

She said Adams' collection of Indiana postmarks helped them piece together chunks of the city's historical jigsaw puzzle.

"Bob's a good researcher. He sticks with it," she said of the retired steelworker.

Adams, a bloodhound for historical research, is already hot on the trail of a second project. He is trying to compile a list of incorporation dates for all of Indiana's cities.

The soft-spoken researcher said he has sent letters of inquiry to 92 county clerks already.

Mrs. Ballantyne, who is no less tenacious, spent the past 10 years gathering materials for the historical museum. She said the museum has "awakened" interest in the city's history.

The history of Hobart's post offices, Mrs. Ballantyne noted, is one of first class efficiency. When Hobart's first federally-operated post office was dedicated in 1936, it passed the rigid inspection of 600 citizens.

Before government entered the postal business, post offices were run by city merchants, she added. "The men for the most part were prominent citizens," Mrs. Ballantyne said.

The city's founder, George Earle, operated the city's first post office from his three-story grist mill on Front and Main Streets in 1847. Far from being crushed by inflation, Earle doled out \$12.60 a year salaries to his workers.

Salaries leaped to 60 cents an hour a hundred years later, Mrs. Ballantyne giggled.

What began as a rural service serving 48 families has become a 50-man operation handling 900,000 pieces of mail monthly.

Although the history of Hobart post offices may not be

"spectacular," notes Mrs. Ballantyne, "it reflects the tenor of the city itself--slow, but steady growth, service to the citizens, integrity and honesty a feature."



Dorothy Ballantyne...pounding out the final draft of "Along the Route," a history of Hobart's post offices and postmasters.